

**UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**  
**PH.D. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**  
**Integrative Specialization Essay & Oral Review**

The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination is for the student to demonstrate integration of social work knowledge and the capacity for producing independent and systematic scholarship consistent with the standards and expectations of PhD education. The exam provides an opportunity for the student to synthesize and integrate content in required and elective courses into a critical examination of the literature in the student's specialized area of interest. The exam is intended to show the student's critical thinking abilities in examining and synthesizing empirical evidence and contributing to knowledge building.

The written exam and Oral Review constitute the Comprehensive Examination of the student's command of their topic relevant to the field of social work. Together, they should:

- Demonstrate that the student has acquired a sufficiently broad understanding of the field;
- Demonstrate the student's proficiency in the required curriculum;
- Determine the student's preparedness to continue work toward the dissertation and their capacity to contribute to the field through an in-depth study of a topic relevant to the practice of social work.

**Format of the Integrative Specialization Essay:** The format of the written exam should be a Word document in the APA style, with 12-point font (double spaced), and include page numbers. The written exam should be 45-50 pages long (references not included).

**Format of the Oral Review:** The Oral Review will be conducted by the Dissertation Committee, the Director/Co-Director of the Doctoral Program, and one external reviewer from the School of Social Work to be chosen by the Director/Co-Director of the Doctoral Program in consultation with the Dissertation Committee Chair, for a total of five reviewers. During the (90 minute) Oral Review students will have the first 20 minutes to respond to reviewer feedback and questions. A summary of the paper by the student is not required, given that all reviewers will have read the exam. Following the presentation, reviewers will pose questions to the student as part of a discussion of the written exam. At the conclusion, the student will be asked to leave and reviewers will decide if the written exam merits a pass or fail.

**Evaluation:** The Comprehensive Examination will be evaluated as a "pass," "pass with revisions," or "fail" at the end of the Oral Review process. If a student's written exam is deemed a "pass with revisions," the student will have two weeks to revise the exam. The reviewers must agree if the revisions are sent only to the Dissertation Committee Chair or to all reviewers for final approval. If a student's written exam is deemed a "fail," the student has one additional opportunity to re-write their exam and have an Oral Review by the end of the academic year.

**Timeline:**

- The written exam will adhere to the framework below to be modified by a student's Dissertation Committee.

- In mid-May (date to be identified based on the calendar), students will receive the exam.
- Students will not be able to consult with their Dissertation Committee on drafts of the written exam or any substantive questions regarding the written exam.
- The written exam is due by the last Friday in August prior to the start of classes in the fall semester and is to be submitted to the Director/Co-Director of the Doctoral Program.
- The written exam will be reviewed by a student's Dissertation Committee, the Director/Co-Director of the Doctoral Program, and one external reviewer from the School of Social Work to be chosen by the Director/Co-Director of the Doctoral Program in consultation with the student's Dissertation Committee Chair, for a total of at least five reviewers.
- Written feedback from reviewers will be submitted to the Dissertation Committee Chair approximately four weeks after the student submits their written exam. The Chair will have approximately one week to summarize key points of the feedback and provide it to the student and all reviewers approximately the last Friday in September. After the Oral Review, detailed feedback from each reviewer will be provided anonymously to the student.
- The Dissertation Committee Chair should be the only person discussing reviewer feedback with a student prior to the Oral Review.
- The Oral Review will occur approximately by the end of October.

### **Instructions for Integrative Specialization Essay:**

The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination is for the student to demonstrate integration of social work knowledge and the capacity for independent and systematic scholarship consistent with the standards and expectations of PhD education. The Chair of the student's Dissertation Committee will draft the Comprehensive Examination question(s) in consultation with other members of the Dissertation Committee based on knowledge of the student's research interests. In the written exam, the student will address an issue or problem of importance for social work related to their likely dissertation topic and discuss significant historical, theoretical, policy, and research issues associated with the topic. This discussion and analysis should demonstrate readiness to begin work on the dissertation.

### **Recommended Outline:**

#### **A. Statement of the Substantive/Problem Area (10 pages recommended)**

Define and demonstrate a familiarity with the substantive problem area or topic. Discussion should demonstrate an understanding of the prevalence, nature, historical antecedents, and recent trends associated with the problem area or topic. Biases, prejudices, and omissions, especially those relevant to vulnerable populations, should be explicated.

#### **B. Analysis of Theoretical Frameworks for Examining the Problem Area (8-10 pages recommended)**

Identify and critically review two to three social theories that provide a context for understanding the onset and/or persistence of the identified social problem/topic. Discussion in this section

should also include an assessment of the utility of the selected theories for informing social interventions aimed addressing at the problem/topic.

**C. Review of Key Practice and Policy Approaches in the Problem Area** (8-10 pages recommended)

Identify key practice and policy approaches aimed at preventing or ameliorating the problem. One major practice and policy approach should be selected and described in detail. Effects and limitations of this practice and policy approach should be identified and discussed. Suggestions for policy and practice changes and/or interventions should be noted.

**D. Critical Review of Relevant Research** (10-12 pages recommended)

Discuss and critically analyze relevant empirical evidence and research related to the problem/topic. This review should include a discussion of the dominant methodological approaches used to examine the problem/topic. Important gaps in the knowledge base should be identified. The section should conclude with the identification of two or more research questions that the student views as necessary to advance knowledge pertinent to the problem/topic.

**E. Conclusion and Implications** (6-8 pages recommended)

Summarize the problem/topic and identify proposed next research steps. Briefly (in approximately three pages) identify a research project that addresses gaps in existing research, including strengths and limitations of the research project given the proposed methodology.